

Aurora County Conservation District (No. 43)

History from 1969 publication:

Aurora County is located on the western edge of the eastern one-third of South Dakota and one-third of the way north from the Nebraska line. The county was created in 1879 and organized in 1882. The railroad came through in 1880 and a homestead boom followed.

Most of the county drains to the southeast through the Firesteel Creek and its branches into the James River; and with a small portion along the west side draining south through the Platte Creek and its branches into the Missouri.

The central to the east part of the county has land that is nearly level to gently rolling and moderately well drained but with poorly drained depressions and with a clay pan from 4 to 10 inches below a loamy surface till. The northeast and southeast parts of the county are more undulating with steeper slopes where the run-off is quite rapid. Along the western edge of the county is an area where the land is a bit rolling with a wind deposited cap of silt loam which is quite subject to water erosion. The soils vary from a silty clay to silt, which are susceptible to erosion and need to be handled with wind and water erosion control practices. These soils produce good grasses and are well suited for grain and livestock farming.

The total land area in the Conservation District is approximately 455,000 acres. Of this, about 238,800 are used for cultivation and are divided about equally between row crops and grains, with 15 percent planted to legumes. About 152,000 acres are in the native grasses, with two-thirds of it used for grazing.

Adequate rainfall during the growing season is the most limiting factor to crop production in the county; and the kinds of crops grown have tended to increase wind and water erosion. The low rainfall has also resulted in deterioration of the rangeland causing the tall and medium grasses to be replaced by short and less productive grasses.

These conditions have resulted in lower production from grasses, crops and livestock; and therefore lower farm income. And so the people were looking for something that they might do to improve these conditions.

About this same time, the WPA was building dams along some of the major streams in the county to conserve water. The Shelterbelt Program came into effect and many miles of field windbreaks were planted. The need for conservation practices was becoming very apparent.

Discussions were held at various times but no concerted effort to formulate plans to organize a conservation district took place until M. L. Warne was appointed Extension Agent on January 1, 1946. Local people instrumental in organizing a conservation district were: A.C. Matteson, Monroe Woods, Henry Gerken, Herb Evans, H. T. Gerhard, C. A. Woods, Otto Miller, R. V. Fitzgerald, Herb Glissendorf, John S. Miller, Dale Fraser, Vic Clark, Lou Justman, and Mrs. Edith Guindon. Meetings were held and on June 24, 1947, the referendum was held and the official tabulation of the ballots was approved by the State Committee

The first Board of Supervisors were: Herb Glissendorf, chairman; L. J. Justman, vice-chairman; M. L. Warne, county agent, secretary; A. C. Matteson, treasurer; John S. Miller, member; and Herb Evans, member. The Aurora County Soil Conservation District held their first meeting on October 20, 1947. The supervisors set up their program and requested assistance of trained personnel in management of Conservation Practices from the Soil Conservation Service.

The problems as stated in the program were: to conserve the soil; to prevent water loss; to maintain soil fertility; to improve pastures; to build water storage facilities; to promote a regrassing program; to improve wildlife conditions; to retire badly eroded fields; to grow more erosion resistant crops; to fill in and grass gullies; to control weeds; and to plant and improve farmstead and field windbreaks.

Since the original organization, the accomplishments have been many and varied. One or more practices have been applied to a large portion of the land. The farmers have used such practices as conservation cropping systems, contour farming, contour furrowing, crop residue use, range deferment, farm ponds, farmstead and feedlot shelterbelts, field windbreaks, fish pond stocking, grass and legumes in rotation, pasture management, rotation grazing, stubble mulching, terracing, wildlife area developments, strip cropping, and grassed waterways.

Some of the permanent type practices installed in Aurora County since 1947 include: 2075 acres of trees planted, 600 farm ponds, 20 miles of terraces and 50 acres of waterways. More than 27,000 acres of cropland has been converted to grassland.

The following table shows the proposed practices, the amount of each practice needed, and the amount accomplished as of January 1, 1965.

Practice	Needed	Completed	Remaining to be done
Conservation cropping systems	238,800 ac	85,700 ac	53,100 ac
Contour strip cropping	0	0	5,865 ac
Terraces	784 ac	14 ac	770 ac
Grassed waterways	2,862 ac	115 ac	2,747 ac
Stubble mulching	18,686 ac	3,686 ac	15,000 ac
Wind strip cropping	80,528 ac	528 ac	80,000 ac
Noxious weed control	6,240 ac	3,240 ac	3,000 ac
Grade stabilization structures	150	0	150
Irrigation storage reservoirs	4	0	4
Irrigation systems	12	0	12
Irrigation wells	12	0	12
Proper range use	152,000 ac	85,300 ac	66,700 ac
Range reseeding	3,165 ac	165 ac	3,000 ac
Stock water developments	1,000	500	500
Water spreading	3,000 ac	0	3,000 ac
Cross fencing	500 mi	0	500 mi
Pasture planting	23,930 ac	15,930 ac	8,000 ac
Proper pasture use	53,000 ac	11,000 ac	42,000 ac
Wildlife development	712 ac	437 ac	275 ac
Fish pond development	50	0	50
Outdoor recreational development	30	10	20
Woodland protective plantings	3,167 ac	1,667 ac	1,500 ac

Others who have served as Supervisors or Assistant Supervisors are: Herb Glissendorf; L. J. Justman, Henry Gerhardt, August Steinfeldt; Philip Borman; Loyd Kuyper.

The 1969 Supervisors were: Dale Frazer, Plankinton, chairman; Arnold Metzner, Stickney, vice chairman; Albert Matteson, Plankinton, treasurer; John S. Miller, Plankinton, supervisor; Herb Glissendorf, White Lake, supervisor; Herb Evans, White Lake, assistant supervisor; and Gerald Giegler, Plankinton, county agent, secretary.

These Soil Conservation Service men have served the Conservation District: C. D. Patterson, Max Marquette, L. H. Rusch, Monty Mantague, Mike Ahern, Claurence Gerken, and Donald Bohn.

Updated information provided in 2012:

On February 2nd, 1965 the Aurora Conservation District adopted a Long Range Plan that was revised in 1975 and again in 1999. During this time the Conservation District was served by supervisors and advisors who were active in educating producers in cropland production, grassland management, establishing woodlands, wildlife habitat and recreation.

The Aurora Conservation District has been a strong supporter to the Firesteel Creek Watershed Project. This has been an ongoing project working with producers in the Watershed to improve the water quality of the creek and Lake Mitchell. Animal nutrient systems, fencing along the creek, CRP and grass planting and grazing plans are all part of the project.

The Conservation District was lead sponsor of the Wilmarth/Twin Lakes Watershed Assessment Project. The project started May 2003 and was finished December 2005. The purpose of the project was to determine the sources of impairment to Wilmarth and Twin Lakes. The goals of the project were to locate and document sources of non-point source pollution in the watersheds and produce TMDL targets and goals for the lakes.

Aurora Conservation District has supported the Lewis & Clark Implementation Project and Riparian Area Management Project. Both projects were utilized to improve water quality and grazing lands with Animal Feeding Operations, Ag Waste systems, grass seeding and management of grazing lands along creek areas.

The Conservation District has worked in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on wildlife, grass seeding, dams and fencing projects funded through grant programs.

The Conservation District supports and works with the Lower James RC&D. Promoting conservation and development through grants programs and projects improving the counties, towns and cities.

The Conservation District has been awarded various Conservation Commission Grants throughout the last 40 years. Many tree, grass and fencing projects were utilized to put Conservation on the Land. Producers utilized these resources to improve the quality of the land.

The Conservation District has sponsored many youth over the years to conservation camps and science camps. Public outreach and youth education are important in the future of our youth in conservation. The Conservation District goes to the schools in the County each spring and assists the Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry with a presentation to the 5th grade on the importance of Arbor Day and how to plant and care for trees. A tree is given to each student. The 5th and 6th grades in the County are given the opportunity to participate in the Arbor Day Essay contest and the top 3 essays are awarded with a cash prize and the winner each year is sent to the State Contest. The Conservation District also sponsors a Local Speech contest. The winner of the local contest then goes the area contest and if they win there then on to the State contest.

Tree planting has been the major business of the Conservation District. The following acres of trees have been planted in Aurora County: 1970-1979 - 943.3 Acres, 1980- 1989 - 581.8 acres, 1990- 1999 - 634.2 acres, 2000- 2011- 1414.2 acres. 2001 – 2005 were peak years for the

CRP tree plantings. The Conservation District has received many Conservation Commission Grants for Multi-Purpose Shelterbelts.

Conservation District services have expanded over the years. In 1995 the Conservation District purchased a new pull type tree planter that is still used today. Hydraulic markers and other improvements have been made to the planter. A weed badger was used for many years along with cultivation to keep tree belts clean. In 1996 the Conservation District started the Fabric Weed Barrier service. That service is still being used today along with chemical services that were also started in the mid 90's.

District Conservationists who have been in service since 1969 are: Merle Kost, District Conservationist; Gary Kruse, District Conservationist; James C. Hunt, District Conservationist and Thomas Clemens, District Conservationist and Chauncey Gerken was a long time Soil Technician. Heidi Rients is our current District Conservationist and Kirt Peterson is the current Soil Conservationist.

Previous Conservation District Secretaries/Clerks were: Gloria Rowen, Kristie Saville, Bea Heismeyer, Janice Kristensen and Twyla Adams. Linda Assmus is the current Conservation District Manager. She has been with the Conservation District since October 31, 1996.

Present supervisors and advisors serving are: Mike Konechne, White Lake, chairman; Ron Tobin, Plankinton, vice-chairman; Dan Hargreaves, Stickney, supervisor; Gregg Sly, Stickney, supervisor; Robert Bruns, Plankinton, supervisor; Lewis Mosemann, White Lake, advisor and Delton Bormann, Stickney, advisor.

Others that served as supervisors and advisors were: Darrel Glissendorf, William D. Anderson, Howard Meade, Ron Glissendorf, Susan Steele, John Grambihler, Steve Vanderbeek, Brent Nielsen, Connie Stephens, Dan Bosworth, Norval Matzner, Dwight Scott and Neal Doering.



Back row: L-R- Gregg Sly, Robert Bruns, Dan Hargreaves, Mike Konechne
Front row: Linda Assmus, Lewis Mosemann, Ronnie Tobin